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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Wow, what a couple of weeks! Mother Nature is really hitting us with a vengeance. Whatever happened to nice sunny and cool autumn days, watching the leaves changing colors? It's been cold, windy, and plenty of rain. Rivers are overflowing causing massive flooding in the Northeast. And to make matters worse, more hurricanes are knocking at the proverbial door. Just what we need to see is more rain. The poor people to the south of me, with a few dams ready to burst. Never doubt the fury of Mother Nature!

Well, we finally have our spring projects completed. It's amazing how difficult it is to get local contractors to come and do projects that aren't "big jobs". Remember our squirrel guests from a couple of years ago? Well, this past spring, we contacted a siding company to repair the damage, as well as some other things. They came out to the house, scoped out the job, gave us an estimate, and that was the last we heard from them. We would call about once or twice a month to find out when we could expect the work to get done. Always the "we'll call you right back" routine. Normally, we'd lose our patience and find someone else, but the problem was that this was the only company around that even bothered to return our original calls. Everyone else didn't want to bother with us because the job was too small! No wonder more and more people are learning how to do their own home repairs these days - you can't get a professional to come out! Well anyway, our siding guy called us mid-week and stated "we'll be there tomorrow" to do the job! Normally, I'd want someone home to make sure everything was going right, but we didn't dare postpone the job for fear it would be next spring by the time they came back. So, they're finally here. At least the squirrels and birds no longer have the means to get under our eaves!

Meanwhile, we're hoping that we don't get totally washed out this weekend. There are leaves to clean up and the lawn hasn't been mowed in three weeks. And, I need to get the snowblower ready for the inevitable New England winter! Fun!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, we're looking at the latest hurricane, and it's a big, strong, fast mama right now. And it's only now that the idea that hurricane seasons run in cycles is being shown some light. Every so often, it seems, Mother Earth decides to kick up a little hell, and we just happen to be present to see it this time.

So, again, we are faced with a question: Is this current hurricane season simply the high point of the global cycle, or is our 'contribution' to the atmosphere in the form of CFCs, unburnt hydrocarbons, smog and various greenhouse gasses having some affect? Worse, could both be true and we're simply increasing the activity of an already active period?

It continually amazes me that, no matter which side of an argument we find ourselves on, we tend to see only one side and exclude any possibility that doesn't fit our mindset.

Even if it is true that global warming is a minimal factor in the changes we see going on around us, wouldn't it make sense to, if not eliminate, at least minimize our contribution? Mark Twain once quipped, "Everyone complains about the weather, but no on ever does anything about it".

Well, today we stand able to have at least a small impact in one direction or the other. Unfortunately, by the time Mother Nature lets us know exactly what our part is in this little show of hers, we'll have much less time to do the much larger task that will be required.

Babbling, you say? Yeah, I am. But it's been a tough week so far, and watching the scenes of the destruction wrought by these storms makes me wonder... ARE we simply bystanders observing what's going on? Are we active participants that don't yet have a clear idea of what consequences our actions will bring?

What bothers me more is that there may be another possibility, just around the corner, that we haven't even imagined yet. As the Vorlons say, truth is a three-edged sword.

Well, that's enough of that. Let's get on with the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Edward Baiz asks about formatting a MiNT partition:

"Is there a program that will format a MintNet partition so it will correctly accept MintNet files that I can run from a Magic,Mint,Tos, etc desktop? I backed up my MintNet partition and do not want to go through the whole installation of Mint using EasyMint."

Jim DeClercq tells Edward:

"Well, maybe. The EasyMiNT distribution includes a MKFS.TTP program, which will write a ext2 file system. If that is what you want, there is a way, it will not be recognized by TOS, and I know nothing about Magic.

One can run MiNT without starting MiNTnet, and have a TOS desktop and access to a ext2 partition. Is that what you had in mind?"

Edward replies:

"Yes, the MKFS.TTP program looks like is what I want.

Yes, I do that [the MiNT/EXT2 thing] now and it does come in handy."

Derryck Croker posts this about JagFest:

"Members of the Cheshunt Computer Club will be manning a table at the above occasion (Rochester, Kent), so do please say hello if you're there!"

Coda tells Derryck:

"I will be there too, with an EtherNat equipped CT60.
Anyone know if we're going to get some internet access this year? (I know - Fat Chance."

Ronald asks Coda:

"How did you get an EtherNAT already? I'm jealous!"

Coda replies:

"It's a prototype, and I'm a developer."

Ronald tells Coda:

"Well, I guess that certainly has some advantages, eh? <big grin>
I've got mine ordered and paid for...just waiting... :-)

PS So do you think the Supervidel will be next? That's something else that me and a lot of other people are excited about!"

Ronald Hall now asks about background color of icons for THING:

"Guys, is there a way to set the background color of the text under icons in Thing to the same color as the window background that its in? That white box is sorta on the ugly side..."

Phantom jumps in and adds to the question:

"What about the current version of NeoDesk. Can the white banner be changed to the background color?

Also, has anyone had any luck using another Font other than the system Font with Current version of NeoDesk? I use Current version of Geneva with it BTW.

If so, any details on what font and from what system SpeedOGDOS or NVDI?"

Greg Goodwin tells Phantom:

"I'm pretty sure that NeoDesk can use any font, but I don't think the background color can be changed.

Note however, that most fonts don't display well when in the tiny fontsize that an icon requires."

Mike Freeman asks Ronald:

"Have you tried Jinnee? I know it's a bit expensive compared to other alternatives, but it is able to change the color of the text background under the icons, like you want to do. It's probably the most feature-packed desktop I've seen on our platform, too.

Someone else suggested making this a request for the Teradesk authors, if you don't mind the much trimmed-down features. That might be a way to go as well, since it's the most actively developed desktop around. Personally, I've tried Teradesk, and after getting used to Thing and Jinnee, it drives me crazy not having all those features. I don't think I could ever switch to it unless they decide to make a non-slimmed-down version of that desktop, which would go against the author's intent. Of course, memory limitations and functioning extremely close to the built-in GEM desktop isn't an issue for me (not too fond of the basic GEM desktop anyway), and I like having as many options available to me as possible. So for you, this might not be a problem."

Odd Skancke replies to the original question:

" No, I'm afraid that is not possible. This is the one thing I dislike about Thing too..."

Ronald replies:

"Hi Odd! Thanks for replying. Well, is that one rumor about the author re-starting development work on Thing true? Perhaps Thomas can be offered a suggestion about being able to change that background around the icon text?"

Odd tells Ronald:

"I think that Thomas is still active and have plans to continue work on Thing, but I also know that he is very busy elsewhere. So I have no idea when we will see a new Thing version. Thomas, if you read, can you say

something about Thing development status?"

Alison jumps in and adds:

"Not sure if this helps (admittedly I know not a lot about Thing).

Have just Googled and some text says here;

Dedicated icon manager.
This is now available as a separate English release from:
Download icon utility now!
http://atari.transaction.free.fr/interactive/software/thng120.htm

If you can't change the colour under the icons then can you not copy, edit, and replace the icons? Thus achieving what you would like by coming in from a different angle."

Frank Szymanski posts his thoughts on the icon color conundrum:

"Well, how about TeraDesk? Although it has the same behaviour it is as far as I know the only desktop that is still in active development.

And by the way, due to the fact that it is the only desktop that can handle very long filenames correctly I recently switched to it. In the beginning I missed some features but in the meantime I start getting used to it."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. We've come to the end of the messages, and it's getting late. See ya next week, same time same station. 'Till then, keep your ears open so you'll hear what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Trapt To Ship Soon!
X-Men Legends II!
Video Game Suit!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Trapt For Playstation 2 Shipping In Late October

Taking on the role of femme fetale, Queen Allura, gamers will be challenged to think in their most evil in wicked ways in order to kill their enemies using a combination of gruesome and deadly traps as their weapons of destruction.

Set in old Europe, the player takes on the role of the seductive Queen Allura, who after being framed for her father's murder, is forced to flee the castle to take refuge from those that are out to kill her. Allura, along with her maid Rachel, escape to the Black Forest, where an evil spell from the devil transforms Allura into a trap master, an evil temptress that uses deadly traps to avenge her enemies. Returning to the castle with the devil as her guide and on a mission of vengence, Allura uses her wicked strategy and skill to set up gruesome medieval traps to lure her enemies in and then destroy them.

Boasting equal parts action and strategy, TRAPT for the PlayStation2 is a unique trap-action game where players will have to think in the most evil and manipulative ways to create the ultimate combination of traps in order to distinguish their enemies. From pre-set traps in the rooms such as blazing fireplaces and falling chandeliers to gruesome and gory traps created by the player like the guillotine and rolling boulder, the player must fully utilize each trap in order to first evade and then annihilate the enemy.

Boasting both a Story Mode and Survival Mode, TRAPT, is a new kind of action game that promises hours of addictive gameplay as players use their wits and skills to create the best combo of traps in order to vanquish the enemy

Features:

* Unique Trap System: The game is equal parts action and strategy that will have gamers thinking in the most evil and manipulative ways to create the ultimate combination of traps in order to distinguish their enemies.

* The Sexy Main Heroine: Play as the sexy and beguiling Queen Alllura who looks so sweet, but is wickedly calculating and cursed by the devil.

* Full-View Map: Set up your traps via a full-view map of the castle

* A Variety of Modes and Bonus Content: Play in Story Mode or Survival Mode, plus enjoy an even deeper story when you play in the Bonus Story Mode!

X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse Ships for the PSP

The epic battle to save humankind rages on the PSP (PlayStation Portable) system with the release of X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse, inspired by Marvel's legendary Super Heroes. Building on the deep customization and rich storyline of the console games, X-Men Legend II: Rise of Apocalypse for the PSP features four additional playable characters, new environments, 9 exclusive missions and groundbreaking multiplayer modes that allow up to four players to compete both online and offline utilizing the system's wireless technology. The game is currently available at retail stores

nationwide for a suggested retail price of $49.99 and has been rated "T" (Teen with mild language and violence) by the ESRB.

In X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse, players create, customize and control teams of four mutants from 20 all-time favorite X-Men and classic Brotherhood villains from the Marvel Universe. With the X-Men and Brotherhood fighting side-by-side for the first time, players switch instantly between teammates wielding amazing super powers and skills as they overcome obstacles, solve puzzles and defeat more than 100 types of enemies including Lady Deathstrike and the notorious Four Horsemen of Apocalypse. In addition to a deep single player experience, the game also features six multiplayer skirmish modes that offer head-to-head action as well as online and offline wireless cooperative modes that offer fierce battles against enemies.

X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse is also available for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Xbox video game system from Microsoft and Nintendo GameCube for a suggested retail price of $49.99 and for Windows PC for a suggested retail price of $39.99. All versions carry a "T" (Teen with mild language and violence) rating from the ESRB. The game was developed by Raven Software for the console versions, Vicarious Visions for the PSP system and Beenox Studios for the PC.

Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi Ships For Playstation 2

Anime action meets intense 3D fighting as Atari announced that Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi has shipped to retail outlets nationwide. Available for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi gives players the "super-hero" experience of huge battles and high-speed flight with its fully interactive recreation of the Dragon Ball Z universe where fighting is possible in the air, on the ground or even underwater.

"Having sold more than eight million units combined since May 2002, the Dragon Ball Z brand has proven popular in the interactive entertainment sector," said Matt Collins, Director of Global Brand Management, Atari. "With such an enthusiastic fan base, it is important for Atari to continually offer Dragon Ball Z games that authentically recreate the series, and we are confident that Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi will be the best DBZ game ever."

The game has already met critical success. In its review of the game, IGN.com said, "Bandai and Atari have consistently shown that they’re dedicated to making their annual line of Dragon Ball Z games better than the titles that have come before them. Year after year, the team has carefully listened to fans and critics alike and addressed concerns and complaints to make a much more playable product. This year continues that trend with Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi, the fourth straight fighter to follow Goku and friends in their search for the mythical Dragon Balls."

Developed by Spike, Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi is the only 3D Dragon Ball Z game to combine fighting and flying in wide open, destructible environments. With the ability to battle in the air or underwater, players have the unprecedented power and freedom to experience the intensity of Dragon Ball Z in an all new way. Offering more than 50 playable characters, multiple gameplay modes and a combination of melee and energy attacks, DBZ Budokai: Tenkaichi promises to be one of most exhilarating Dragon Ball Z

games yet.

Rated 'T' for Teen, Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi for the PlayStation 2 is available for a suggested retail price of $49.99.

* One of the hottest brands in the video game industry with more than eight million units sold since May 2002;

* 512 episodes of Dragon Ball, Dragon Ball Z and Dragon Ball GT have aired, collectively;

* More than $3 billion in worldwide merchandising;

* More than 15 million Dragon Ball Z home videos sold;

* More than 8.5 million hits per day on http://www.dragonballz.com;

For additional information on Dragon Ball Z please visit http://www.atari.com/dragonballz.

Groups Sue California Over Minors Video Game Ban

Two industry trade groups sued the state of California on Monday after the state passed a law barring the sale of violent video games to minors.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the former screen "Terminator" who is himself portrayed in several video games based on his Hollywood roles, vowed to fight the suit, which was filed in federal court in San Jose.

"I will do everything in my power to preserve this new law and I urge the attorney general to mount a vigorous defense of California's ability to prevent the sale of these games to children," Schwarzenegger said in a statement.

"California's new law will ensure parental involvement in determining which video games are appropriate for their children. I believe strongly that we must give parents the tools to help them protect their children."

The trade group Entertainment Software Association announced its intentions to fight in court immediately after Schwarzenegger signed the ban 10 days ago. Video Software Dealers Association joined in the suit.

"It is not up to any industry or the government to set standards for what kids can see or do; that is the role of parents," Douglas Lowenstein, the group's president said.

"Everyone involved with this misguided law has known from the start that it is an unconstitutional infringement on the First Amendment freedoms of those who create and sell video games."

Federal courts have ruled against violent video game legislation in Washington state, the city of Indianapolis and St. Louis County in Missouri, saying the moves violated constitutional free speech guarantees.

The California ban came in the wake of lively debate after game publisher Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. pulled its best-selling game "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" from retailers this summer because of hidden sex

scenes.

The state’s measure bars the sale and rental to minors of games that show serious injury deemed especially heinous, atrocious or cruel. Violators are subject to a $1,000 fine.

Sony Expects to Sell 2.5 - 3 Million PSPs This Holiday Season

Sony Corp. plans to sell between 2.5 million and 3 million PlayStation Portable handheld video game devices in its first North American holiday season, the head of Sony Computer Entertainment America said.

"We’re going to try to double the installed base between now and the end of the year," Kaz Hirai, Sony Computer Entertainment America president and chief executive, told Reuters in a telephone interview.

Hirai said the company had sold about 2.3 million PSPs in North America as of the end of September.

About the size of a paperback, the PSP can be used as a photo viewer and also plays movies and digital music. It debuted in late March in the United States.

The company also said it would begin offering a PSP Giga Pack for $299. The PSP bundle will hit stores in time for the holidays and include various accessories such as a 1-gigabyte memory stick, which can store about 30 hours of music. Sony will continue to sell its $249 PSP Value Pack with a 32-megabyte memory stick which holds the equivalent of one to two albums of music.

The PSP along with other handheld game players, such as Nintendo Co. Ltd’s Game Boy Advance SP and DS, have driven game sales and helped offset the impact of a slump in console game sales amid a transition to next-generation consoles from Sony, Microsoft Corp. and Nintendo.

U.S. video game hardware and software sales were $10 billion in 2004.

Hirai also said Sony is expecting to sell 2.5 million to "a tad below 3 million" units of its industry-leading PlayStation 2 console in North America between now and the end of 2005. That machine will compete with Microsoft’s new Xbox 360, which is slated for a November 22 North American release.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

Atari Game Sells for $2,000 on eBay

An Atari game cartridge called Pepsi Invaders has sold for $1,825 on eBay. According to Atari Age, Coca Cola commissioned this game to be given to its Atlanta employees. The gameplay is the same as the classic game, Space Invaders, but with the letters 'P E P S I' in the place of the alien invaders. The auction's owner bought the game with a bunch of others in a flea market ten years ago, only now realising its value.

The value of rare games and consoles is hard to judge, especially since the majority of retro games are easily emulated on modern day PCs and consoles. It's hard to say what makes people pay so much for games that were created relatively recently, in comparison with antiques and other collectibles. Its certainly not the ability to be able to play the game itself. No self respecting collector would actually play a game more than two decades old, for fear of breaking part of their collection.

If a gamer has some sense of nostalgia about a game, it's not hard to go and find an emulator that will play the game. So does games culture really need game collectors? Wouldn't this $2,000 have made a much more positive impact if it was donated to a special cause or charity? With the internet making games and their emulators easily accessible, it's hard to understand why we crave material packaging for what is essentially non-physical software.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FBI Raid Shuts Down Suspected Spammer

A man described as one of the nation's leading senders of spam says an FBI raid on his home office has halted his e-mail operation.

Warrants unsealed last week show that a September raid on Alan M. Ralsky's home in a Detroit suburb included the seizure of financial records, computers and disks.

"We're out of business at this point in time," Ralsky said. "They didn't shut us down. They took all our equipment, which had the effect of shutting us down."

Terry Berg, the top deputy in the Detroit U.S. attorney's office, declined to comment.

Ralsky, 60, has said that he has 150 million or more e-mail addresses, and he has been a target of anti-spam efforts for years.

Verizon Communications Inc. sued him in 2001, saying he shut down its networks with millions of e-mail solicitations. He settled, promising not to send spam on its networks.

A federal law that took effect last year bans use of misleading subject

lines and the sending of commercial e-mail messages that appear to be from friends. It also bans use of multiple e-mail addresses or domain names to hide senders' identities.

Court Stops 'Legal' File Sharing Site

A federal court has temporarily banned a Los Angeles-based Web site from claiming that its service lets users legally share copyrighted files, the government said Wednesday.

The Federal Trade Commission said that Cashier Myricks Jr., doing business as MP3downloadcity.com, has been barred from suggesting that his $24.95 tutorial and referral service enables users to legally download copyrighted music files, video games and "movies still in theaters." According to the FTC, it doesn't.

A temporary restraining order was issued on Sept. 27 by the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. The FTC is seeking to make the ban permanent, negotiate refunds for consumers who feel they were misled, and require that the defendant notify people who use the service about legal consequences of sharing copyrighted material.

The FTC charged that the Web service advertised on Web sites, sponsored Google links and in e-mails with misleading claims like, "Best of all people are not getting sued for using our software. Yes! It is 100 percent legal" and "Download and Watch DVDs and Movies Still in Theaters."

The commission said that thousands of consumers have bought the service, which is actually a tutorial with referrals to free file-sharing software programs, like those from Kazaa and Grokster Ltd.

Myricks' site itself on Wednesday claimed "Napster's Number One Replacement Software is Back!" and "Now You Can Burn, Download MP3s, and Make CD's Free."

At the bottom of the site, a link through the word "Legal" led to a page that said, "File sharing is not illegal so long as you abide by all relevant copyright laws. Sharing copyrighted material without the permission to do so is illegal." The page further advises users to stay legal by removing copyrighted material from their shared folders.

Some artists allow their music to be copied freely, but for the vast majority of recorded music, special permission is necessary - for example, participation in a licensed program like the new Napster, which is not free.

Myricks did not immediately respond to e-mail requests for comment through the support link on his Web site. Several other e-mails were sent to accounts that appeared to be affiliated with Myricks, and a once-listed telephone number in Carson, Calif., was not in service.

His lawyer also did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

Email Spammers Face Jail Under New Nigerian Law

Nigeria, home to some of the world’s most notorious cyber crimes, has proposed a law making spamming a criminal offence for which senders of unsolicited emails could be jailed for at least three years.

The draft law identifies the use of computers for fraud, spamming, identity theft, child pornography and terrorism as criminal offences punishable by jail terms of between six months and five years, and fines of 10,000 naira to 1 million naira.

Under the bill, which has to be approved by the National Assembly to become law, convicted spammers face jail terms of three to five years and could also be made to hand the proceeds of crime to the government.

"Any person spamming electronic messages to recipients with whom he has no previous relationship commits an offence," said a section of the draft law obtained by Reuters on Wednesday.

Under the proposed law, service providers who aid and abet cyber crimes and fail to cooperate with law enforcement agents could be fined between 500,000 and 10 million naira.

The draft law empowers law enforcement agents to enter and search any premises or computer and arrest any person in connection with an offence.

The advance fee email scam, known as "419" after the relevant section of the Nigerian Criminal Code, is a computer age version of a con game dating back hundreds of years and is sometimes called "The Spanish Prisoner."

Typically spammers send millions of unsolicited emails around the world promising recipients a share in a fortune in return for an advance fee. Those who pay wait in vain for the promised windfall.

President Olusegun Obasanjo has been keen to clean Nigeria’s image as a country of spammers and one of the world’s most corrupt nations since he was elected in 1999, ending 15 years of military rule in Africa’s to oil producer.

He set up the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in 2003 to crack down on email fraudsters who had elevated scamming to one of the country’s main foreign exchange earners after oil, natural gas and cocoa, according to campaigners.

The anti-fraud agency is investigating hundreds of suspects and prosecuting over 50 cases involving about 100 suspects.

The agency got its first major conviction in July when a court sentenced a woman whose late husband masterminded the swindling of $242 million from Brazilian Banco Noroeste S.A. between 1995 and 1998, one of the world’s biggest email scams.

The agency signed a deal with Microsoft last week to help fight spamming, phishing, spyware, viruses and counterfeiting.

Man Who Ran Web File-Share Hub Sentenced

A man who ran an Internet file-sharing hub where computer users could swap

movie, music and software files was sentenced Thursday to three years probation and ordered to use the computer only for personal use.

Jed Frederick Kobles, 34, pleaded guilty in August to a single felony count of conspiracy to commit grand theft. He is the first person in California to be convicted on state charges for illegal file sharing, prosecutors said.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge David Horowitz knocked down Kobles' crime from a felony to a misdemeanor and suspended a 180-day jail sentence. Kobles also will appear in an anti-piracy ad for the film industry to be shown in theaters, Deputy District Attorney Jeffrey McGrath said.

"I think he has learned a very good lesson out of this," McGrath said. "When you engage in the illegal trade of these materials, it's not victimless - it's not free."

Under the terms of his sentencing, Kobles, who lives in Las Vegas, won't have to report to a probation officer, but if he breaks the law during the next three years, he can be ordered to serve his suspended jail sentence.

Kobles did not speak during the hearing and declined to comment outside the courtroom.

His attorney Paul Kossitch also declined to comment.

At the time of his arrest in February, Kobles operated an online file-sharing hub in Los Angeles known as UTB Smokinghouse under the name Raging8. He now works at a 7-Eleven store in Las Vegas.

Over four days in January, Kobles and other unidentified co-conspirators made films like "Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines," and "National Treasure" available on the Internet for others to download without permission.

To have access to the free content on Kobles' hub, computer users had to have their own selection of content that they were willing to make available. An undercover investigator who gained entry into the file-sharing ring downloaded more than 14 movies, TV shows and music videos, prosecutors said.

Accused Spyware Installer Settles Lawsuit

The former chief executive of a company accused of secretly installing adware and spyware on millions of home computers agreed to pay $750,000 in penalties after an investigation, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said Thursday.

In April, Spitzer sued Los Angeles-based Intermix Media Inc., saying the company was responsible for sending software tens of millions of times on computers across the country and three million times in New York.

Adware and spyware deliver nuisance pop-up advertisements and can slow and crash personal computers. Spitzer said such programs are fraudulent and threaten to discourage e-commerce.

Shortly after filing the suit, Spitzer's office began investigating

Intermix’s founder and former CEO Brad Greenspan, Spitzer spokesman Brad Maione said.

Greenspan, 32, served as CEO of Intermix from July 2002 to October 2003. Investigators said he directed employees to bundle adware with other free programs and to make the software difficult to remove.

"This agreement sends a message that intrusive and deceptive practices will not be tolerated," Spitzer said.

Greenspan did not admit to any wrongdoing in the settlement. In a statement, he blamed the company’s current management for increasing the amount of adware attached to Intermix’s offerings and with deceiving investigators.

"My departure from Intermix in 2003 preceded the focus of the New York attorney general’s investigation on Intermix’ practices beginning in late 2004," he said. "During my tenure at the company, the adware division was a small part of the business ... I continue to stand by my statements that it was the current Intermix Management team that ramped up the company’s adware-download program aggressively during the investigation by the New York attorney general and misrepresented the status of the adware pop-up product."

Intermix runs a collection of Web sites featuring quizzes, games and jokes that it packages for advertisers. It also owns MySpace.com, the popular social-networking site.

Spitzer said that Intermix’s agreement to pay $7.5 million in penalties over three years and stop distributing adware programs was approved by state Supreme Court Judge Judith Gische.

Intermix "is pleased to put this historical matter behind us," said Linda Goldstein, an attorney representing the company. "This was activity in the company’s past and to a large extent had been largely ended by the time the investigation began."

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth Dreifach disputed those assertions, saying Intermix continued to attach spyware to its programs well into 2005.

"Our investigation began in September 2004 and we found numerous examples of programs" bundled with spyware, he said. "We contacted them in December and we were fairly surprised they went ahead with these egregious practices. It continued essentially to the eve of our suit."

Software also agreed to pay $35,000 to end an investigation by the attorney general’s office of its bundling of adware with free screensavers without providing notice to consumers, Spitzer’s office said.

News Corp., the media conglomerate controlled by Rupert Murdoch, last month completed its purchase of Intermix for $580 million in cash.

Code in Color Printers Cracked by Consumer Group

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a consumer privacy group, revealed Wednesday that it has cracked a tracking code found in a popular line of Xerox printers. The miniscule yellow dots have been secretly

embedded in every document printed by several lines of color laser printers and were designed to allow the U.S. government to trace copies.

The dots, less than a millimeter in diameter and repeated over each page of a document, are only visible under blue light with a magnifying glass or microscope.

"We've found that the dots from at least one line of printers encode the date and time your document was printed, as well as the serial number of the printer," said Seth Schoen, staff technologist and lead researcher at EFF, in a statement.

The EFF-led research team first looked at the Xerox DocuColor printers and eventually discovered dots in documents printed by those machines and ones manufactured by Brother, Cannon, Dell, Epson, HP, Kyocera, Lexmark, Textronic, and others. The EFF cannot say when the coding went into effect; the group has uncovered documents up to 10 years old that contain the dots.

The U.S. Secret Service said Wednesday that the tracking code is part of a deal it struck with some manufacturers of color laser printers to track counterfeiters.

"It's strictly a countermeasure to prevent illegal activity specific to counterfeiting," Eric Zahren, an agency spokesperson, told the Washington Post. "It's to protect our currency and to protect people's hard-earned money."

A spokesman for Xerox, Bill McKee, confirmed the presence of the secretly embedded code to the Post, but said the company only was working in conjunction with government agencies, competing manufacturers, and a "consortium of banks." In a statement, HP said that it is contributing to anticounterfeiting efforts and is supportive of cooperation between the printer industry and those attempting to stymie counterfeiters.

The problem with the hidden code, according to Lee Tien, EFF senior staff attorney, is that not only was the deal secret, but also that there are currently no laws on the books to govern law enforcement's use of the information the codes provide.

"The Secret Service is not bound by their statement to the Washington Post," Tien said. "I'm not aware of any legal restraints on what they can do with [the information]."

Chris Hoofnagle, senior counsel for the Electronic Privacy Information Center, agreed that the lack of oversight was disturbing. "The privacy risk is that these codes may be later used for other law enforcement efforts outside counterfeiting, or to identify people who try to participate in political debates anonymously." The veil of secrecy was so tight that even state and local law enforcement had been kept in the dark.

Although it might sound like science fiction or conspiracy theory, there are bound to be other products that contain hidden tracking codes, Tien said, and he called for more public scrutiny of what the government is doing to manipulate the items citizens use every day.

"When we don't share information with each other about what is going on, we just handicap ourselves," he said.

Gates to Students: Software Is Where It’s At

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates hit the road last week to urge college students to pursue degrees in computer science. The three-day, six-college tour was the second such pilgrimage made by Gates in two years to emphasize the potential of technology careers and to dispel concerns about outsourcing.

Gates told students that over the next 15 years, computer science graduates would be in ever-increasing demand in North America. "You’re going to have tons of opportunities. If there’s a field to get into, this is it," he told a surprised class of introductory programming students at the University of Wisconsin at Madison on Wednesday.

With a sneak preview of the Xbox 360 video game console and an assortment of other gadgets in tow, Gates demonstrated new types of technology on the horizon. He predicted that the HD DVD will be "the last physical media format there will ever be." To help make that happen, Gates said he will need a lot more software engineers.

"In the next decade, there’ll be a shortage of great software engineers. We’ll be scouring the schools for them," Gates told the students at Madison. "Software is the place where all the action is. It is an area that will continue to generate jobs. This is the golden age of software."

Statistics from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics would seem to back up Gates. According to the bureau, computer software engineer is projected to be one of the fastest-growing occupations in the next few years.

The agency predicts that "despite the recent downturn in information technology, employment of computer software engineers is expected to increase much faster than average for all occupations, as businesses and other organizations adopt and integrate new technologies and seek to maximize the efficiency of their computer systems."

University career advisers and analysts agree that demand for computer engineers will increase. However, some wonder if Gates is the most appropriate messenger.

According to Bob Richards, associate director for employee relations at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the sheer size of Microsoft will turn off many MIT students because they have a more entrepreneurial spirit.

"Any change Microsoft makes is like turning the Queen Mary around in a bathtub," he said. "Students tend to go with sexy start-ups than big behemoths."

For Laura DiDio, research fellow at Yankee Group, Bill Gates remains someone whom college students should emulate. And, unlike the current glut of lawyers, computer science graduates will always be in demand both in the U.S. and abroad, DiDio said.

"Computer software engineering is a growth market," she said, "and graduates will make a very comfortable living."

More Lawmakers Back U.S. Control of Internet

Three lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives called on Friday for the Internet’s core infrastructure to remain under U.S. control, echoing similar language introduced in the Senate earlier this week.

The resolution, introduced by two Republicans and one Democrat, aims to line up Congress firmly behind the Bush administration as it heads for a showdown with much of the rest of the world over control of the global computer network.

"Turning the Internet over to countries with problematic human-rights records, muted free-speech laws, and questionable taxation practices will prevent the Internet from remaining the thriving medium it has become today," said California Republican Rep. John Doolittle in a statement.

Doolittle introduced the resolution with Virginia Republican Rep. Bob Goodlatte and Virginia Democratic Rep. Rick Boucher.

Countries including Brazil and Iran want an international body to oversee the addressing system that guides traffic across the Internet, which is currently overseen by a California nonprofit body that answers to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The European Union withdrew its support of the current system last month, and the issue is expected to come to a head at a U.N. summit meeting in Tunisia in November.

The Bush administration has made clear that it intends to maintain control.

If a settlement is not reached, Internet users in different parts of the globe could potentially wind up at different Web sites when they type an address into their browsers.

U.S. lawmakers have backed the Bush administration’s stance, arguing that a U.N. group would stifle innovation with excessive bureaucracy and enable repressive regimes to curtail free expression online.

Top Republicans and Democrats on the House Commerce Committee sent a letter of support to the Bush administration earlier this month. In the Senate, Minnesota Republican Norm Coleman has introduced a resolution supporting the administration’s stance.

"The United States is uniquely positioned in the world to protect the fundamental principles of free press and free speech, upon which the Internet has thrived," Goodlatte said in a statement.

The United States has not always taken a hands-off approach to Internet regulation. In August the Commerce Department asked the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the California body that oversees domain names, to postpone action on a proposed .xxx domain for sex sites.

Feds Want Banks to Strengthen Web Log-Ons

Federal regulators will require banks to strengthen security for Internet customers through authentication that goes beyond mere user names and passwords, which have become too easy for criminals to exploit.

Bank Web sites are expected to adopt some form of "two-factor" authentication by the end of 2006, regulators with the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council said in a letter to banks last week.

In two-factor authentication, customers must confirm their identities not only through something they know, like a PIN or password, but also with something they physically have, like a hardware token with numeric access codes that change every minute.

Other types of two-factor authentication include costlier hardware involving biometrics or "smart" cards that would be inserted into designated readers on a user's computer.

Banks might also issue one-time passwords on scratch-off cards or require "secret questions" about a customer's account, such as the amount of the last deposit or mortgage payment.

The council also suggested that banks explore technology that can estimate a Web user's physical location and compare it to the address on file.

The most common way of stealing consumers' personal identity data and financial account credentials online, known as phishing, typically involves sending e-mails that direct unwitting users to phony Web sites. Data harvested at such sites is then used fraudulently.

The Anti-Phishing Working group, an industry association, reported 13,776 unique types of phishing attacks in August.

While some financial institutions have given their customers electronic password tokens, those have tended to be optional. Other banks have instituted password entry through mouse clicks instead of typing, a protection against keystroke-snooping programs.

But in general, the industry can do more to stop account fraud and identity theft, according to the financial institutions council - which includes the Federal Reserve; the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.; the U.S. Comptroller; the Office of Thrift Supervision and the National Credit Union Administration.

"The agencies consider single-factor authentication, as the only control mechanism, to be inadequate for high-risk transactions involving access to customer information or the movement of information to other parties," the council wrote. "Account fraud and identity theft are frequently the result of single-factor ... authentication exploitation."

FDIC spokesman David Barr said the rules will serve as standards that will be checked when banks' practices are audited.

Although the requirements apply just to financial services companies, the policy could stimulate wider use of two-factor authentication by other merchants that are willing to "federate" their Web sites with banks, said Michael Aisenberg, director of government relations for Internet services provider VeriSign Inc.

VeriSign is a member of the Liberty Alliance, a group that is working to develop standards for federated authentication.

In a federated system, a two-factor login at one site would be recognized by another, so a travel agency associated with your bank would

automatically grant you access if you came straight from the financial institution’s Web site.

At the very least, Aisenberg said, "The securities industry is going to have to go along and other regulated sectors will no doubt follow along as well."

Vista To Include Antispyware Software

Following the release on Monday of the latest beta of Windows Vista, Microsoft has confirmed that it plans to integrate its antispyware software into the operating system. The move could set Microsoft in a pitched battle against Internet security vendors and potentially government antitrust regulators as the company prepares for the 2006 release of Windows Vista.

This second Community Technology Preview (CTP) for Vista does not include any actual antispyware code. However, reports indicate that there was visual evidence of a new built-in, security-center feature through which users will be able to manage settings for patches and other security options, including antispyware settings.

Microsoft cautioned that the Vista October CTP is just a preview and contains many features that still are under development, which means these features might or might not make it to the final release.

In the wake of company’s recent announcement about readying antivirus software for desktops, Graham Cluley, an analyst at Sophos, warned that the company’s moves represent a shot across the bow of those vendors who have a significant stake in the consumer-security market.

Microsoft’s move into the security space could have industry rivals leveling charges of unfair competition. According to an eWeek report, Symantec already is gearing up for a fight by filing an informal complaint with European Union antitrust regulators regarding steps Microsoft has taken to enter the security space.

Still, said Cluley, companies probably will not want to rely on built-in protection for Windows Vista and instead will continue to purchase products that they know will provide them with the highest level of protection, responsiveness, and service against malicious threats.

However, with most consumers woefully unprepared for protecting their home machines from malicious attacks, the inclusion of a built-in antispyware product will be a good thing for them, said Cluley. He pointed out that, in contrast to businesses, home users weigh price more heavily than quality, responsiveness, and service when choosing security software.

"Home users desperately need antispyware protection in Windows to help keep their systems secure," he said. "It might not be the very best protection, but it’s better than nothing at all."

Overall, said Cluley, the news that Microsoft will be bundling its antispyware product in Windows Vista is good news for home users, many of whom still do not recognize the threat spyware poses and do not realize they need protection.

Analysts are not considering this move a slam dunk for Microsoft. The

company faces two major challenges as it attempts to recast itself as a serious security player. First, said Cluley, Microsoft will have to adjust to a different set of expectations from its antispyware users. Computer users typically expect their security vendors to respond much more quickly to problems than Microsoft is accustomed to responding to problems in its operating system.

"Customers expect fixes within minutes rather than months," Cluley said.

The second major challenge for Microsoft, Cluley said, is basic public relations. For instance, Microsoft just announced that one of the critical security patches it released last week has caused serious problems for some users installing it. With Microsoft's stature as the world's largest software developer, these revelations lead to major headlines.

Cluley said that the company and consumers should expect hackers to target the operating system and "use every opportunity to disable [the antispyware's] functionality."

Starting in February 2005, shortly after Microsoft's antispyware software entered its first beta, malware was written to disable the software. Since that time, according to Cluley, hundreds of other attacks have included "turning off Microsoft antispyware as a standard part of their arsenal."

Computer Museum Getting $15M From Gates

The Computer History Museum, the world's largest institution dedicated to preserving Information Age artifacts, is getting a hefty financial boost from one of the biggest names in the computing industry.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has pledged a $15 million gift - the museum's largest donation yet, museum officials said. The gift means the Silicon Valley-based museum needs only about $50 million more to reach its $125 million goal of creating a full range of educational programs and exhibits and establishing a long-term endowment.

"The impact on our society of the computing revolution is simply breathtaking - it has changed the way we work, play, learn, and communicate," said Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corp. and the world's wealthiest man. "It's our responsibility to collect the artifacts and stories today that will explain this incredible change to future generations."

The museum opened in Mountain View in 1996.

Gates, who began his interest in software and programming computers at age 13, founded Microsoft Corp. in 1975.

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